

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 600

EC 303 440

AUTHOR Silverman, Linda Kreger, Ed.
TITLE Valuing Parents.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 20p.; In: Silverman, Linda Kreger, Ed.; Knopper, Dorothy, Ed. Understanding Our Gifted. Volume 6, Issues 1-6, September 1993-August 1994; see EC 303 439.
AVAILABLE FROM Open Space Communications, Inc., 1900 Flosom, Suite 108, Boulder, CO 80302 (annual subscription for six issues: individual, \$30; institutions, \$35; international individual, \$40; international institutions, \$45).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Understanding Our Gifted; v6 n1 Sep-Oct 1993
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Advocacy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Student Needs

ABSTRACT

This theme issue on the role of parents in the education of their gifted children contains two feature articles. "'Pushy and Domineering': A Stigma Placed on Parents of Gifted Children," by Lynn C. Cole and Roxana M. DellaVecchia, examines how parents are perceived as "pushy and domineering" when they strongly advocate for appropriate education for their gifted children and explains that training, dialogue, and partnership are necessary to break the barriers separating teachers and parents. "Educating Educators," by Cathy Silva, chronicles the efforts of a mother to advocate for her highly gifted child in obtaining the special services he needed, by precisely defining and documenting the need and anticipating school responses. Regular columns in the journal discuss "parent bashing," the age-grade lockstep, creative books, empathy as a part of giftedness, the family as a sociological unit, instructional perspectives, literature resources, and images of giftedness in multicultural picture books. (JDD)

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UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED[®]

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

September—October, 1993

Volume 6, Issue 1

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"Pushy and Domineering": A Stigma Placed on Parents of Gifted Children

Lynn C. Cole, Ph.D. &
Roxana M. DellaVecchia, Ph.D.

It is time for the annual Kindergarten Round-Up. Carli and her mother are excited about this upcoming event. Carli's mother reflects with pride about all the things Carli has already learned, and has high hopes for how much Carli will continue to grow intellectually throughout her formal schooling. Her wish list also extends to other qualities Carli needs to be a happy and contributing member of society: self-fulfillment, well-roundedness, empathy, love, and friendliness.

Carli is looking forward to the puppet show by the first grade class, a tour of the building, and a promise of cookies and juice at the end of the day. These are things no five year old would want to miss. Carli also is eager to have a chance to tell the teachers what she has learned. Yet, by the end of the event Carli has not had a chance to talk about the things that interest her: The Tales of Peter Rabbit, why the dinosaurs became extinct, which insects were added to the collection at the Natural History Museum, or about how she chooses fish

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Cathy Silva

I had expected my son, Russell, would receive a typical education: a playful year of kindergarten with a beloved teacher, six fun filled years in elementary school, two turbulent years at middle school, ending with four active years in high school preparing for college. Russell, however, did not turn out to be typical. The prepackaged education at the school failed to meet his needs. In time I discovered that meeting his needs would require many and sometimes radical modifications to the package. Since our school had no procedure for identifying and adapting to the children that didn't fit its age-grade lock-step system, these children "fell through the cracks." That is, unless someone advocated for them. In my son's case that advocate has been (and still is) me.

The Child's Experience

The realization that Russell might not tread the traditional path through school began when he finished the first grade. He told us that school was just too boring. He was fed up with being mobbed every day by his classmates for the answers to worksheets. He made up his mind to drop out of school and he was dead serious.

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FROM THE EDITOR

As we begin a new school year, we also initiate the sixth volume of *Understanding Our Gifted*. We are very proud of the theoretical and philosophical contributions our journal has made in addition to providing guidance in the parenting, teaching, and counseling of gifted children. We are deeply grateful for all of the positive responses we have received to our last issue on the "Philosophy of Giftedness."

In this issue, we explore attitudes toward parents. Parenting is the most difficult, underpaid, and undervalued job any human being can undertake. Parenting any type of exceptional child complicates this responsibility tenfold. Parents of other exceptional children receive sympathy, support, professional guidance, and assistance from a variety of sources. In contrast, parents of gifted children are regularly made fun of, as if they were some kind of sad joke. Those who patronize or laugh at parents of the gifted do not realize that this is *bigotry*, and just as inappropriate as any other form of prejudice. In an enlightened society desperately trying to learn how to value diverse populations, why is this form of bigotry so invisible?

The first lead article, "Pushy and Domineering," by Lynn Cole and Roxana DellaVecchia, summarizes their study of teachers' perceptions of parents of the gifted compared with parents' self-perceptions. They explain how the breakdown in communication between educators and parents of the gifted occurs and what can be done to bridge that gap. Our second lead article, "Educating Educators," describes Cathy Silva's own personal odyssey in getting an appropriate program for her highly gifted son. Her story is exhausting but has a happy ending. She echoes much of what Lynn and Roxana found in their study. This issue provides much food for thought.

While many of our regular columnists elaborate on our theme of "Valuing Parents," Jerry Flack, Lisa Wright and Stephanie Tolan suggest wonderful children's books that might be considered for holiday gift giving. Speaking of holiday gifts and better communication between home and school, why don't you consider buying a gift subscription to *Understanding Our Gifted* for your child's teacher or copies of special issues to give to school board members? We also have a new product line: books to help you with parenting and building your child's self-esteem. If you are working on a book related to gifted children please consider submitting your work to Open Space Communications. We would love to hear from you.

Linda Silverman

Understanding Our Gifted (ISSN 1040-1350) is published bimonthly by Open Space Communications, Inc., P.O. Box 18268, Boulder, CO 80308-8268. Subscriptions are \$30 for 1 year (6 issues). Canadian/foreign subscriptions are \$40.00 U.S. funds. Institutions add \$5 to rates shown. Back issues are \$8.00; Canadian/foreign \$10.00. Third class postage paid at Boulder, CO. Subscription inquiries should be sent to the publishing office. For subscription address changes, send mailing label along with new address to *Understanding Our Gifted*, 1900 Folsom, Suite 108, Boulder, CO, 80302, eight weeks before moving. Material in *Understanding Our Gifted* may be copied for personal use only. No material may be reproduced for publication without written permission of author and publisher. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright 1993, OPEN SPACE COMMUNICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Design by Concepts Unlimited.

UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED

Published by
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Communications, Inc.

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HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

Three Faces of Empathy

Usually when we think of empathy we refer to an identification with the feelings of other people. Often gifted children and adults who are empathic suffer the pain of others and want to relieve it (compassion). In addition to their affective identification, this type of empathy implies a cognitive process in which the empathic person strives to accurately understand both the feelings and ideas of another. Accurate understanding comes about because of both an imaginative projection by the person of his or her own thoughts and feelings in a similar situation (identification) and because of an openness to the affective projections of the other—sometimes to the point where the empathic person actually feels the other's feelings. This type of empathy can be direct as when a person strives to understand how another person really thinks and feels about an issue. It can also be indirect as when the empathic person takes a witnessing role to show others how the suffering person might feel. An example of a person with indirect empathy is Dorothea Lange, the photographer who documented many of the injustices done to people by uncaring institutions, the government and other people. Her photographs of migrant farm workers during the Depression are especially poignant.

The second type of empathy, less often recognized, has to do with a sensitivity and identification with other living things. In this type of empathy, the person allows the self to be suspended so as to enter into a relationship with the matter to be studied. For example, Barbara

McClintock, studying corn genetics, used her empathy to learn the ways of corn. She could feel the corn growing in the field, identify with its characteristics and use her *conation* (an unconscious process that brings material into consciousness) to allow her to recognize the inner workings of the corn chromosomes. She developed theories about how genetics worked based on her empathic understanding; her conceptions were verified many years later when electronic microscopes were invented (Keller, 1983).

The third type of empathy is concerned with non-living things. In this type of empathy, an internal journey that makes use of intuitive and conative processes allows the person to discover the essence of the object being studied. This discovery of essence can be so acute that even if part of the whole is missing, the person can use internal processes to determine the missing parts. For example, understanding the function of an ancient tool might require an empathy with tools in general, with how mechanical things work, with the materials best used to make tools, and with how a particular material might best be used to derive a particular function. Once that is understood, the empathic artisan can recreate the tool and show its probable function in an ancient culture.

Another example of this empathic process of discovery is Stephen Wiltshire, an adolescent artist in England with autism whose drawings of buildings are unusually perceptive and empathic. At one point, in Venice,

he drew a view enveloped in mist, putting a window in a dome that did not appear to have one. As the mist rose, the other members of his group which included BBC filming his drawing, saw that the dome indeed had such a window just where he drew it (Wiltshire, 1991, p. 18).

Empathy is an important part of all giftedness. The intellectual, intuitive and affective components of empathy present in the gifted individual to a high degree suggest that this much neglected aspect of giftedness needs as much nurture as other aspects. Indeed, empathy may be the glue that holds the various processes of creative endeavors together.

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- Keller, E. F. (1983). *A feeling for the organism. The life and work of Barbara McClintock*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
Wiltshire, S. (1991). *Floating cities*. New York: Summit Books.

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PARENTING

What Is a Family?



Every Sunday evening, after dinner, Lisa's family has a special time set aside to talk or play together. Even though the children look wistfully at the turned-off television, Lisa and Larry enjoy the get-together. Dad and Mom are ready to start. Little Bobby toddles in with a spoon in his hand. Busily, he walks over to Lisa, pokes her with a spoon, and says, "Mine!" Then he goes to Larry and with a satisfied smile, pokes him and says, "Mine!" Now he grins at his father, "Mine!" And finally he crawls on his mother's lap, chuckling, "Mine, mine, mine!" Their mother, who is a psychologist, smiles too, and says, "Now you see an example of the self-centeredness of the very young."

Larry: "What does 'self-centered' mean?"

Mom: "When you think you're the center of the world and think only of yourself."

Lisa: "But Mom, I think grown-ups understand the big words but not the wisdom of little children. He is doing just the opposite. He is learning how every member of our family belongs together."

Dad: "But what he's saying is that he owns everyone."

Lisa: "No, Dad, he's saying we all belong together. I feel the same way. You belong to me. You are my father. And I belong to you. I am your daughter. Nothing can ever change that."

Larry: "And you are my sister. And nothing can change that. I'm not sure

that's so great. I can never finish my computer games when you are around. And, and, and..."

Dad: "Should we talk tonight about what it means to you to have to live with Lisa and have her interrupt your computer games?"

Lisa: "No, I would like to talk about what it means to be a family." Larry consents reluctantly.

Mom: "Why don't we each start by telling what we think the family is. Larry, would you like to start?"

Larry: "I think you'll be surprised at me. I love my family, even though I get annoyed at everybody. Bobby runs between my legs; Lisa bothers me; Mom makes me set the table; Dad won't let me use his tools. But I feel you all like me and you'll never leave me. And we belong together. Just like Bobby said, 'Mine, mine, mine.'"

Lisa: "I want to tell you something I never told you before because it's silly. I often feel I'm like a flower. Like the more I grow and learn, the more I will be just myself and maybe I'll even become pretty. But flowers grow in soil, so where's my soil? It must be my home and my family. Of course, Larry, I fight with you, because I know you'll always be my brother. If I fight with my friend, Amy, she could stop being my friend."

Dad: "I'm really touched by what you two are saying." He has tears in his eyes. "Family relations are very

confusing. They're not always wonderful, but I think the main thing is that we all seem to feel we belong together."

Mom: "Everybody seems to have a role in the family. I think I'm the family worrier. I care so much about everybody and I often seem to be concerned that something might happen."

Lisa: "You know how Mary spends so much time at our house. I've told her how I feel like a flower. She said that if she thought of herself as a flower she would be afraid someone would step on her or wouldn't water her. Her parents fight a lot and they don't seem to notice her."

Mom: "It sounds like they don't have the invisible strings that hold our family together. These strings are like rubber bands; they will twist and stretch but never break."

The family is the child's first community. It is the model for their future—the basis from which they learn about the world. The modern family takes many forms, yet in any form the family can provide the invisible rubber bands that allow children to grow in safety.

Dr. Annemarie Roeper is a consultant on the gifted in Oakland, California, and author of the book, *Educating Children for Life*. Co-founder of the Roeper City and Country School and the *Roeper Review*, Annemarie has inspired a worldwide focus on global awareness in gifted education.



INSTRUCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Teachers of the gifted have an uncommon bond with parents of their students. I believe they also value these parents to an exceptional degree. In this column I will explain how I believe this bond comes about and why these parents are especially valued.

Teachers of the gifted fill a lonely professional niche. In the faculty lounge, the topic of conversation centers on students who cannot or will not learn, rather than on voracious learners who consume curriculum at an alarming rate. (Alarming when teachers must locate or generate the material themselves, frequently for several grade levels of gifted learners.) The majority of teachers may believe that (a) programs for gifted students are not necessary; (b) all gifted students are, or should be, model students; and (c) teaching smart students all day is an easy, fun, and satisfying task. Teachers of the gifted know and are constantly reminded of these beliefs, and consequently tend to listen a great deal and talk very little about their professional concerns for their students. As they listen, they feel as different from their colleagues as gifted students feel from their age peers and parents of gifted children feel from other parents.

In the same way, parents of gifted children have a lonelier-than-usual parenting job. As has been noted,

complaining about a child who is too smart for the school work being offered is like complaining about not being able to gain weight. To people who have not experienced the angst of raising a gifted child, you cannot be too thin, nor have a child that is too smart. When parent and teacher of the gifted meet, they both have a rare opportunity to discuss the child's needs with someone who has at least some understanding of them and of the difficulty of meeting these needs. Parent/teacher conferences can become an oasis of support in the desert of indifference, lack of understanding, and outright hostility both parties may face on occasion.

Many times, teachers and parents of gifted children have similar goals. In essence, they both want what is best for these children and to help them become all they can be. In focusing

on how to encourage, support, and instruct, they may find having an ally not only refreshing, but valuable. As parent and teacher each search for the means of carrying out their part of this endeavor, they may turn to each other as resources. Through sharing, discussing, or dissecting ideas, the bond between teacher and parent strengthens, and they may come to consider each other friends.

Educators and parents of gifted students are uncommon people striving to meet uncommon needs and reach uncommon goals. Through these dynamics, an uncommon bond is forged; a bond that is uncommonly valuable and valued.

Shirley W. Schiever, Ph.D., is a curriculum specialist at the Fine Arts Magnet School in Tucson, Arizona, and the author of *A Comprehensive Approach to Teaching Thinking*.

My Kindergarten

*I loved to draw rainbows, but teacher didn't like them very much
so I stopped drawing.*

*I wanted to read big people's books, but I had to learn the alphabet again.
I did not want to read anymore.*

*I wanted to learn more addition and subtraction,
but she made me count to ten.*

*I did not like math anymore.
But teacher still did not like me very much.*

Marcus Dupona, Age 6

THE READING ROOM

This visit we are venturing into different worlds—both the authors we discuss today are Australian, and both write science fiction. The subject of their books is human intelligence. These two books give readers plenty of food for thought about science, research, intelligence, and the human species, so arrogantly known to itself as *homo sapiens sapiens*.

A Cage of Butterflies, by Brian Caswell, is meant for middle grade to young adult readers. The setting of the novel is "The Farm," a scientific research center more properly known as the Institute, where have been gathered a group of very highly gifted adolescents. The Institute is part school, part camp, part laboratory, and the children have come willingly, as their extraordinary minds have given them all extreme difficulty relating to the "normal" world. Here they have each other (a kind of group identity); a young scientist who studies, but also cares about them; and their own work/learning.

Another project at the Institute, highly classified, involves a group of seven year olds, apparently autistic and totally uncommunicative, referred to by everyone as "The Babies." These children are far behind their chronological age in physical development, but their autism masks an intelligence far more extreme than that of the adolescents—an intelligence that uses a powerful form of telepathy. The Babies' intelligence is not solely intellectual, but includes a deep ability to connect—to love and create love in return.

The two scientists in charge of the Institute, greedy, self-serving and determined to discover the secret of the younger children's minds, use research methods that endanger their lives. The Babies' only hope is to rely on the abilities of the older children, whom they teach a form of their own mental communication—a far richer sort than mere linear language. But is there any place in the regular world for their unique reality? Most readers will find this a real page turner.

Brain Child, by George Turner, is an eerie, disturbing and challenging book for adults. However, gifted high school students are likely to be intrigued both by its exciting plot and its extremely complex contemplation of the nature, possibilities, and dangers of extreme intelligence.

The story takes place in Australia in the Twenty-first Century, many years after a government project called "Project IQ" used genetic engineering to create sets of super brilliant *in vitro* siblings. Three groups, each comprised of two boys and two girls, were successfully reared to adolescence. Group A were highly intellectual (the scientists), Group B highly creative (the artists) and Group C represented a total

departure from the human species, their intellects so vastly beyond those of humans, that there was almost no possibility of communication between them and their creators/captors. Under mysterious circumstances, Group C commits suicide before reaching adulthood. Twenty-five years later, the illegitimate son of a Group B member (the narrator of the story) is called upon to find Group C's "legacy," the presumed instructions for more perfect genetic tampering. A highly complex thriller.

Both stories deal with the dangers and moral questions of research on human subjects, both with the nature of intelligence and the isolation of extreme giftedness. Like *Jurassic Park*, *Brain Child* (a contemporary *Frankenstein*) also considers the vast complexity of reality, the effects of chance, and the arrogance of scientists venturing into territory beyond their ken and acting beyond their ability to envision consequences. Each is a "good read" that should lead to interesting and fruitful discussions.

Stephanie Tolan, from Columbus, Ohio, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.



BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Tell Me a Story: Images of Giftedness in Multicultural Picture Books

"Plea-ea-se, just one more story!" What parent has not heard (and responded) to this plea repeatedly during his or her child's early years? It has been well documented that young gifted children are especially voracious story listeners. It is not unusual to observe a baby whose first word is "book," a fatigued parent reading a tenth or eleventh book to a bright-eyed, engrossed toddler, a three year old who selects her favorite stories by looking only at the titles on the spine of the books, or a four year old who is deeply engaged in complex chapter books. It is evident, then, that these young children respond consistently to books with great enthusiasm. The visual delight, the rhythm of the language, and the magic of the stories create an experience that is anticipated each day.

Perhaps this unrelenting need (yes, it is a necessity) for books arises from the child's desire to explore ideas and situations that reinforce and extend her own experiences. Therefore, as parents respond to their child's developing literacy, the stories offered should depict a rich and authentic view of our world community. This parental role is crucial and ensures that the child will be enriched by a wide range of stories that reflect our multicultural heritages. Especially important is exposure to picture books that showcase young children from diverse backgrounds who exemplify characteristics of giftedness. That is, characters who are multidimensional, creative, competent, authentic, and adept problem solvers. Through exposure to this literature, a youngster

will not only develop an appreciation of the many faces of giftedness, but at the same time identify with many of the issues raised in the books. For example, *Amazing Grace* portrays a young African-American girl who has a vivid imagination. Grace loves to pretend to be storybook and historical characters. Her great triumph, however, is when, after great determination, she is awarded the role of Peter in her school play, Peter Pan. Young gifted girls will identify with Grace's tenacity and her imagination, and will feel reassured that girls can do anything.

Sharing selected books will affirm a child's feelings, clarify issues, and bolster the child's self-image. However, these outcomes are achieved only when parents take the time to raise questions and discuss the stories. After the story telling, the listener should be encouraged to analyze and evaluate the character's actions and speculate about what he might have done in that situation. The strength of the character should be discussed and the child should be encouraged to "see himself" in the character. Exchanges such as these will offer a greater understanding of many worthwhile issues, thereby providing the child with opportunities for intellectual and moral growth. Certainly, a worthwhile endeavor!



To get you started, here is a short list of selected picture books that portray diverse images of giftedness:

- Altman, L. (1993). *Amelia's Road*. New York: Lee & Low. (Latino)
- Baig, M. (1981). *Tye May and the Magic Brush*. New York: Mulberry. (Asian)
- Castaneda, O. (1993). *Abuela's Weave*. New York: Lee & Low. (Latino)
- Dorros, A. (1991). *Abuela*. New York: Dutton Children's Books. (Latino)
- Goble, P. (1978). *The Girl Who Loved Horses*. New York: Macmillan. (Native American)
- Hoffman, M. (1991). *Amazing Grace*. New York: Dial. (African-American)
- Hopkinson, D. (1993). *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (African-American)
- Isadora, R. (1979). *Ben's Trumpet*. New York: Greenwillow. (African-American)
- Keller, H. (1992). *Island Baby*. New York: Greenwillow. (West Indian)
- Martin, P. (1993). *The Little Painter of Sabana Grande*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan. (Latino)
- Moss, T. (1993). *I Want To Be*. New York: Dial. (African-American)
- Stewart, D. (1993). *The Dove*. New York: Greenwillow. (African)
- Merrill, J. (1992). *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars*. New York: Philomel. (Asian)
- Williams, V. (1984). *Music, Music for Everyone*. New York: Greenwillow. (Latino)
- Winter, J. (1991). *Diego*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (Latino)

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for her aquarium. Instead, she has been asked to identify her colors and shapes, count to ten, talk about and draw pictures of her family, jump and hop, and build with blocks.

Meanwhile, Carli's mother has been in another part of the expansive gymnasium. She has informed the teacher that Carli was walking at 10 months, talking in sentences before she was 18 months old, and reading before her third birthday. She also has mentioned Carli's analytical skills, such as how she selects fish for her aquarium, and her understanding of the various extinction theories of the dinosaurs. Carli's mother searches the teacher's face for some acknowledgment that such behaviors are unusual, and finds none. She then poses the question, "Do you think my child is gifted?" There is a smile and the reply, "We like to think that all of the children in our school are gifted."

"All children are gifted," implies that all children are the same—there are no notable differences that need to be addressed instructionally. While this statement is intended to convey the teacher's desire to make all children

Carli's mother, like the parents in our study (Cole & DellaVecchia, 1992), left the gymnasium feeling awkward and embarrassed that she had suggested her daughter might be "gifted." Like the parents we studied, she noted that her daughter was a lot like she was as a child; it seemed to her that Carli was "intellectually advanced" beyond the curriculum for kindergarten. She worried that her daughter would be destined to a year of learning shapes, colors, numbers, and the letters of the alphabet—again. She might have wondered if part of the communication problem was the teacher's thinking that her only interest was in Carli's academic abilities—without realizing the emotional and social goals also on her wish list that day.

Parent Advocacy

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* identified gifted students as an endangered population, generally achieving less than anticipated in our nation's schools. That same document directed parents to be advocates for their children, to refuse to accept less than

intensity of their advocacy and sheds light on this stereotype? We know parents are motivated to nurture their children. Bloom (1985) supports this in his study, *Developing Talent in Young People*. His contention is that behind successful adults with exceptional talent were the guiding hands of parents. He tells of sacrifices parents made to provide more challenge for their children—seeking tutors, mentors, or coaches as their children's talents demanded additional attention. Bloom describes parents of gifted children as

...child oriented and willing to devote their time, their resources, and their energy to giving each of their children the best conditions they could provide for them. Almost no sacrifice was too great if they thought it would help their children's development. (p. 510)

We know parents of gifted children seek to nurture their children's social and emotional development, not only their intellectual development. Many parents in our study report having strong altruistic goals for their children (Cole & DellaVecchia, 1992). However, concern for their children's overall development is often overshadowed by the battles surrounding the children's academic needs.

Another thing we know about many parents of gifted children is that they are intelligent, educated, and articulate. They prepare for advocacy by consulting with experts, reading, networking, and volunteering in the schools. This makes these parents not only bright, but well-informed about the issues. Consequently, they may appear intimidating in their advocacy for their children.

We also know that parents of gifted children often find themselves as lone advocates—acting as individuals without the solidarity of a group. Because our nation still has not

Many parents of gifted children . . . prepare for advocacy by consulting with experts, reading, networking, and volunteering in the schools.

feel special, it is, in fact, insensitive and abrasive. Sentiments like this "homogenize" children and support parents' worries that their children's unique strengths, and even weaknesses, will not be acknowledged. Consequently, parents are left with two options: quietly supplement with enrichment at home, or strongly advocate for appropriate education at school. Unfortunately, when parents choose the latter option, educators often perceive them not as "assertive and persistent," but rather as "pushy and domineering."

the best, and to be vigilant and active in their children's education. More recently, *Beyond Rhetoric* (Carnegie Council on Children and Youth, 1991) continued to support the iterations of the previous decade—that parents must be involved in the education of their children. Yet, the motives for this involvement by parents of gifted children often are misinterpreted, thereby creating the stereotypical "image of 'Behind every gifted kid, there is a pushy parent!'"

What do we know about parents of gifted children that explains the

embraced gifted children as a group in need, there is a widespread lack of organizational support speaking for parents and their gifted children. Being lone advocates, coupled with the intensity and fervor of noble intentions, makes parents of gifted children targets for criticism and misunderstanding.

Additionally, we know parents are hesitant about using the term *gifted* in reference to their own children and in the public realm. They are fearful of animosity from those who interpret the term as a value statement, rather than as a descriptor of intellectual ability. As a result, these parents resort to using the term only when an advocacy need arises, and then, only with great caution (Cole & DellaVecchia, 1992).

And finally, we know that parents of gifted children are the ones who identify their children's talents in the earliest stages of development (Bloom, 1985; Ehrlich, 1982). Furthermore, our study indicates that parents most often seek the support of teachers to confirm the abilities of their children (Cole & DellaVecchia, 1992). When teachers fail to provide this confirmation, parents attempt to persuade teachers to view their children from their own perspectives. To understand the parent point of view is to "see" these gifted children as their parents do—in unrestricted and informal settings—in places where the children's talents can surface and be nurtured. Most teachers do not have this opportunity. Instead, teachers see the children only in formal, restricted, and linear classroom settings.

The Communication Gap

Such mutually valid, yet narrow perceptions, place teachers and parents on different wave lengths in their communication with each other. Some teachers perceive parents' accounts of

their children as exaggerated; this perception blinds them to the need to provide appropriate educational adaptations. Other teachers may be open to parental interpretations, and willing to adapt the curriculum, but unable due to administrative constraints. In either situation, parents feel betrayed, and indeed alone, in acquiring educational and emotional support for themselves and their children.

The realization that continual progress promised by schools is an entitlement for all children except their own plunges parents into an intensified, singularly focused advocacy effort. The intense advocacy of frustrated and overwrought parents can spark a defensive posture from teachers. Teachers often respond with displaced anger, due to a lack of resources or support, adopting stereotypical views of the parents of gifted children.

One of the greatest contributors to the parental stigma of "pushy and domineering" is the communication gap that occurs at the parent/teacher conference. Most parent-initiated conferences focus on the child's exceptionality—his or her giftedness. Teachers, on the other hand, usually initiate conferences when a child's behavior is an issue. Parents often perceive their child's bad behavior to be directly related to insufficient stimulation in the classroom. Therefore, whether parent or teacher initiated, most conferences eventually return to the topic of the child's exceptionality. However, much is left unsaid in the typical conference with parents of gifted children. The time constraints of most conferences, and the urgency of the matter at hand, prompt a singular focus on the child's intellectual development. The conference circumstances seldom allow parents to express their long range visions and concerns for their child's emotional and social well-

being. All this leads educators to perceive, erroneously, that parents view exceptional intelligence as the only important aspect of their children. In truth, many parents do view their child's giftedness as the dominant influence in the school experience. They realize that this exceptionality has an impact on their child's *total* life experience, which includes the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral realms.

The stereotypical image of parents of gifted children seems to persist even when teachers receive training in the characteristics and educational needs of gifted students (Cole & DellaVecchia, 1992). It appears that in the course of teacher training, sensitivity to parents of gifted children is either glossed over or neglected. Likewise, in the majority of schools where educational programs for the gifted occur, or where teachers assume some responsibility for identifying or instructing gifted children, there are few programs to address the needs of parents of gifted children.

Special education regulations encourage parents of children with disabilities to become involved in the development of appropriate educational programs; however, such nationwide encouragement does not exist for parents of gifted children. There is not the same purposeful coordination of efforts to build partnerships between the teachers and parents of gifted children. Consequently, parents who choose to become involved in developing educational programs for their exceptionally advanced children are met with animosity, complacency, or an overwhelming sense of intrusion. Such feelings are further exacerbated when teachers associate requests for differential accommodations for gifted children as an implication that they aren't "doing their jobs."

Effective Partnerships

It seems as if in all directions there are roadblocks to the dialogue required to create a nurturing environment for gifted children. As educators and parents we should feel some distress that purposeful dialogue is lost, and our children are placed in the middle. Partnerships in the education of gifted children—that is, partnerships between educators and parents—must be forged to create better programs for gifted children, and to open channels of communication. These partnerships need to be made from both sides.

Partnerships between educators and parents must be forged to create better programs for gifted children and to open channels of communication.

A vehicle for structuring more effective partnerships lies in both teacher and parent education. Teacher training, while it addresses developmental and learning aspects of gifted children, also needs to address aspects of parenting gifted children. It is important to understand parental anxieties and concerns, as these concerns are critical to the successful education of gifted children. Just as important, parents need training in ways to approach educators. Parent training seminars should include information about gifted programs, and should also address effective advocacy.

Parent and teacher education should assist in breaking the mold of stereotypical perceptions. For more effective communication with educators, parent training should focus on:

★ **Tactful Communication**—valuing the teacher's time, assessing appropriate opportunities, and interacting assertively, not aggressively.

★ **Active Listening**—displaying an interest in and gaining insight into the teacher's perceptions, and probing unsolicited remarks for more information.

★ **Comprehensive Focus**—sharing goals that include more than just intellectual accomplishments, conveying the importance of children's physical, social, and emotional development, and inquiring about children's weaknesses, as well as strengths.

For more effective communication with parents, training for educators should focus on:

★ **Tactful Communication**—valuing parental perspectives of their own children's abilities, respecting their knowledge of issues surrounding gifted education, and dialoguing with parents as equals.

★ **Active Listening**—displaying an interest in gaining insight into parent perceptions, probing for more information on how children function in non-classroom settings, and seeking suggestions for nurturing interests and strengths in the classroom setting.

★ **Comprehensive Focus**—acknowledging intellectual abilities and stating goals that reflect continual progression, highlighting children's achievements in other than academic areas, addressing children's weaknesses in relation to normal child development, and presenting a plan for compensating weaknesses.

Ultimately, educators and parents must build a relationship based on trust. Trust implies that *all* children will receive an education that nurtures

and challenges their talents. Trust implies that *all* teachers will be identifiers of and nurturers of talented youth. Trust implies that parents will be allowed to question program implementation, not as an attack, but as a parental responsibility. Trust implies that parent/teacher communication will be open and will allow for displays of honesty and mutual vulnerability. Finally, trust implies a true and equal partnership in the education of gifted children.

Awareness of how parents are viewed is only the first step in eliminating the negative image. Training, dialogue, and partnership are necessary to break the barriers separating teachers and parents of gifted children. Only when these are accomplished can an end be put to the stigma of "pushy and domineering."

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I felt panic. How could a child feel ready to be a dropout after the first grade? Why had I not seen how deeply school had affected him? What could I do to change his mind? I acknowledged his decision but asked him if he would please give school another try. I promised Russell that his father and I would advocate for him throughout the year to make sure he had a positive experience. He reluctantly agreed.

After testing his reading level, his teacher reported to us that he was three grades ahead in reading. She had also given him the end-of-the-year test for his present grade. There were some things he didn't know, such as dictionary skills. She felt it was best for him to stay where he was, but we should not worry. She would allow him to read books of his choice when his work was finished. Though we had doubts that this was the answer (I was haunted by a question Russell posed to me when he was still in the first grade: "Mommy, do you ever go to school when they teach you something you don't already know?") we conceded, not knowing what to suggest instead.

By early spring Russell began to complain again about boredom in school. After looking through his textbooks at home it was obvious why school bored him. Then I volunteered to correct papers in his class once a week. This would help me to see him from the teacher's point of view. I could also get a feel for how the other children were performing in his class. (Maybe he wasn't as far ahead as I thought.) Last, we brainstormed with Russell on what changes might help him.

The three of us spoke with his teacher. "Russell has expressed frustration with his school work to us. Could he

perhaps have a third grade math book or go to the third grade class for math?" She told us that she had never seen or heard anything that indicated to her that he was unhappy in school. As for the math the answer was, "Sorry, but no."

Could he have a different spelling list? Yes, he could have some different spelling words though she stressed that it was more important for him to "be a boy." At home I tested Russell on the words in the new spelling book she had given him, which was a spelling book for the same grade he was in by a different publisher. He knew all these words as well. I sent the spelling book back to the teacher with a note to that

effect. I suggested that his father and I make up a spelling list for him, coordinating it with the science lesson, and sent in a sample for the first week: *Fahrenheit, cumulonimbus, Celsius, barometer*. She called to say she had spoken with the principal about this modification and he had disallowed it. Our spelling words amounted to acceleration. The school had a policy of no acceleration. A brief chat on the phone with the principal confirmed this.

Test Scores

At that point we thought that if we were going to press the school for changes we needed to be clear ourselves about what he needed and what we wanted the school to provide. Our first step was to find out what information the school already had about his aptitude and achievement.

We made an appointment with the school psychologist to look at Russell's records. Russell had all 99 percentiles on achievement tests and a group IQ test of 141, but they didn't

think he needed any modifications based on his scores. If observational evidence, parent's perceptions, Russell's complaints and their own testing could not convince them that Russell needed something different, then the next step was to find someone whose opinion they would respect.

We had him tested by a well known local psychologist and the results were similar to those obtained at the school, although his Verbal IQ was 12 points higher. The psychologist did not recommend any type of acceleration. He was not the advocate we had hoped for.

Since schools deal mostly in the verbal domain, surely his Verbal IQ would impress them. What sense did it make to pretend to teach him information he already knew? Why was he required to take the whole year to learn those few things he did not already know? We decided to talk to the superintendent about this policy and our concern with Russell's boredom and growing cynicism with school.

A Verbal IQ of 153 did not move the superintendent. He did not understand why we were concerned with boredom in a child seven years old. Besides, there were enrichment opportunities in every classroom for children who got their work done. (But Russell told us that these "enrichment opportunities" were just more worksheets on books he had already read or about things he already knew.) The superintendent's conclusion was that we had a student-teacher personality conflict and offered to let us pick Russell's teacher next year.

Why would no one take Russell's feelings seriously? Why were our concerns being discounted or brushed aside as unresolvable? We hadn't approached anyone in the school in a demanding way or taken an offensive attitude. What would it take to convince these people that Russell was

"Mommy, do you ever go to school when they teach you something you don't already know?"

not surviving in school, let alone thriving in it?

Precisely Defining the Need

Throughout this time I read prolifically and attended a conference on gifted children. I tracked down the phone numbers of two of the presenters at the conference, Stephanie Tolan and Kathi Kearney. Putting aside my fear of looking foolish, I called them. "He couldn't be highly gifted, could he?" "I think he is," came the answer from Stephanie. "How can you say that? You don't even know my son, and his IQ numbers and achievement scores aren't that high," I argued. "Because you are calling me at my home in Ohio from New York. Parents of moderately gifted children don't take the desperate actions that parents of highly gifted children do." She had hit the nail on the head. I felt desperate, and I had started to act desperately. I called my second "expert," Kathi Kearney. "He needs to be tested on the Stanford-Binet L-M; these WISC-R scores are not the whole story. If three or more WISC-R subtest scores are at or near the ceiling then the student needs to be tested on an instrument with a higher ceiling." Our hearts were telling us to travel to another state for the Stanford-Binet L-M while our heads were questioning whether we were blowing this all out of proportion and wasting a lot of money.

During the last month of the school year we went to see a specialist in another state. We were stunned when Russell's IQ score came back over 40 points above his previous testing and his achievement levels were seven or more grade levels above his current grade placement. It was incomprehensible. There was pride and happiness, but lots more disbelief, and a huge amount of "What will we do?" Back to the literature I went, reading

everything I could on how to teach and nurture children with this type of development.

Coping When Advocacy Fails

In the meantime school was simply unbearable and Russell began to get mid-week stomach aches. It just didn't make sense for the nurse to send him home from school after it made him physically sick. It seemed to me that he should come home before school made him sick. I asked Russell to think about which days of the week he had activities that he found tolerable and which days bored him the most. Then he choose one day a week to stay home. On his day off we went to the park. I also gave him permission to not do any school work which he felt was inappropriate for him. I told him I didn't care about grades that obviously didn't reflect what he was learning. Russell chose to do the work anyway, but it was his choice. Giving him this control also helped relieve some of the stress he felt.

Then I considered the options for the coming school year. If I sent him back to the elementary school I would have to educate the principal, teacher and probably some others about giftedness. Educating the educators appeared to be a considerable task. In theory, I could force them to do what I thought was right, but did I want him taught by a staff who might resent him because they were being coerced? Was I prepared emotionally to be the kind of assertive, confrontational person it would take to advocate for him in a school that seemed openly resistant? And then there were Russell's feelings to consider. His attitude towards school was one of cynicism and distrust. The odds of getting the next school year to be a good one for Russell did not look

good. Our local private school was no better prepared to deal with Russell's special needs. Together we decided to homeschool instead. It wasn't going to be easy. I might not do the best job. But at least I loved him, and accepted him for who he was. He seemed to need that even more than he needed the right curriculum. Nevertheless, despite all the frustration and anger I felt towards the school, I cried as I drove past it. Shattered was my expectation that he would go to school happily, getting lots of A's, having fun in sports and extracurricular activities and me merely being his cheerleader.

Plunging Into Homeschooling

Not knowing where to begin teaching Russell at home we decided to use the by-mail educational planning service of the Center for Talented Youth (CTY) at Johns Hopkins University. Russell took the SCAT (School and College Aptitude Test) and out-of-level STEP (Sequential Test of Educational Progress) tests in English, reading, and mathematics. We got the test results back with a long list of recommendations. It wasn't the precisely detailed teaching prescription I had anxiously hoped it would be, but later these test scores and recommendations turned out to be important documentation of Russell's special needs.

I continued reading journals and books and networking in gifted education and homeschooling. I took a graduate level course for teachers on how to teach gifted children in the regular classroom where I learned all about the modifications schools could make to accommodate gifted children, if they wanted to, as well as strategies for teaching at home.

During the first year of homeschooling I learned about a one-day-a-week

gifted program in a neighboring district for children working a minimum of four grade levels above their present placement. The entrance exam was the SCAT. Russell had already taken the SCAT through CTY, so I didn't need to get my school district's permission for him to take the qualifying exam. But would my school district agree to allow (and to pay for) a homeschooled child to attend a program that they did not offer to their own gifted children and was not in their district?

Anticipating Their Questions

In considering my approach to the school district I tried to imagine what they would have to know in order to be able to make a decision on my request. They would need to know if my request was legal, some of the finer details of the regulations concerning homeschooling as well as the general ones, if the other district would allow my son to participate and what enrollment procedures must be followed. It took many hours of research and phone calls to collect this information.

In my letter to the superintendent requesting permission for Russell to attend the program I acknowledged that this was probably an unprecedented request and that he might have some questions about the legality and protocol for approving and implementing such a request. In a small binder I neatly laid out all that information for him in a question and answer format, documenting each of my answers with either a photocopy of the applicable section of education law or state education procedures and a contact person in the education system. When I got a call from the superintendent he said, "You've done all my work for me! I didn't have to research a thing!" He immediately put my request on the agenda for the

school board to vote on, as was the procedure. When the time came for us to address the school board we spoke little, other than to answer their questions. So as not to appear to be bragging about how smart he was we focused exclusively on Russell's need to be with *same-aged intellectual peers* as our reason for wanting him to go to the gifted program rather than due to his academic needs. They must have been sympathetic to the same-aged peer issue because they miraculously voted to pay for Russell to go. The lesson I learned from this was an important one: *make it as easy as possible for them to say "yes"!*

"How long are you going to homeschool?" was a frequent question I heard. I didn't know. One possible strategy was homeschooling him until I felt he was ready emotionally, socially, and academically to attend the middle school. The middle school seemed to have a lot more flexibility and accelerative options already built into its structure. Perhaps the staff there might be a little more understanding of Russell's needs and willing to work with us to find ways to nurture him within the school. Towards the end of our second year of homeschooling we decided to find out if this were true.

When we decided to ask the school to consider him for reentry with accelerated placement I used a similar written approach. I felt the challenge of getting what he needed from the school district would be greater this time though. From my previous meeting with the superintendent I knew what the policy was: no acceleration.

Documenting the Reason

I was concerned the school officials would be overwhelmed by the mountain of documentation and information that I would need to send

them in order for them to be properly informed to make a decision on Russell's reentry. I decided to call first essentially to get the school to ask me to send them the information I had. I spoke with the Director of Special Services who would be the initial contact for Russell's reentry. Since the school would need achievement testing in order to determine a proper placement for Russell, I wondered if they would like to see the testing I had had done already. "Sure," was his reply. As we had given some thought as to what type of placement might work for Russell, would he like to see our ideas? "Yes, send those along with the testing. When the tests have been reviewed we will meet with the principal and psychologist to discuss them with you." Did I want him to

Why would no one take Russell's feelings seriously? What would it take to convince these people that Russell was not surviving in school, let alone thriving in it?

skip a grade? he probed. (I wanted him to skip more than one.) "Well, we would like to discuss it," I responded. "I just hope you are not coming to us with a list of demands," he told me frankly. "I just hope you aren't going to be a brick wall," I replied. "Our hope is that we can sit down together as a team. We value your input as experienced educators; if you can value ours, then we will work well together."

I then prepared our written request for Russell to reenter school. After a polite letter I included copies of the results of his testing. The amount of documentation of his ability could not be quickly dismissed. Following the tests was our two page outline for an individual education plan (IEP) which included radical acceleration in both grade and specific subjects, the gifted

program in the other district, attending the middle and high schools, and exemptions from normal requirements for middle school students. These were followed by 15 highlighted articles documenting the appropriateness and success of acceleration and, most importantly, several articles documenting the lack of negative effect of acceleration on the social and emotional development of students who experience it. The last page was a list of the names and addresses of ten professionals I had consulted who were willing to offer assistance in developing an IEP, if we requested it. All of this was preceded by a table of contents. (A friend joked that I had neglected to insert labeled tabs!) This amounted to a one-inch stack of paper which was put into a three ring binder. I made exact duplicates for the psychologist, the principal, the director and ourselves and delivered them to the director's office.

At our meeting with the administrators Russell's capabilities and needs were not questioned. They were prepared to implement the IEP I had written with

few modifications. They said that the superintendent was skeptical when they first approached him about it but he readily agreed after he read the information I had given them. "So you actually read the binder?" I asked surprised. "Oh, yes! In fact we studied it!" At the end of the meeting I thanked them for their openmindedness. They explained that their openness had a lot to do with the binder of information I had supplied. The principal confessed that if I had called and said, "My son has a high IQ and I want....," he would have had a different response.

An Advocate to Those Who Will Listen

So much for "plug him in at kindergarten and 13 years later out pops an educated kid"! Every step of Russell's education, and there are more steps than the average, has had to be conceived, researched, planned, orchestrated and paid for. There has been considerable cost in educating

myself to be an effective advocate: private testing for Russell, consultations with professionals, subscriptions to professional journals, conferences, the graduate course, books, and long distance phone bills from networking, not to mention my time. It's an ongoing process.

Another parent once scolded me for doing all this work, "It's the school's job." Maybe it is. But after the amount of time and effort I have put into planning his education I see why the school has not taken the time to do it. And I recognize that the teachers and administrators are likely to be as uneducated as I once was about children with profoundly different intellectual development. I don't have the expectation, therefore, that a school will know what Russell needs and how to provide it. I just hope that they will be willing to listen and learn from someone who does.

Cathy Silva has a bachelor's degree in psychology and is the mother of three children, two of whom have profoundly asynchronous development.



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Personality Plus

Parent Bashing

In preparing to write a chapter on "Family Counseling," I read all that I could find in the literature on parenting gifted children. The more I read, the more upset I became. Parents were accused of flaunting their children's IQ scores, being less intelligent than their children and jealous of their abilities, valuing their children only for their gifts rather than for who they are as people, being so awestruck by their children's IQ scores that they forfeit their role as parents, being overly protective or putting too much pressure on their children, and antagonizing teachers with their unreasonable demands. One researcher even suggested that mothers label one of their children as gifted (the "star") for their own narcissistic ego needs!

When I couldn't stand much more, I called Betty Maxwell, the Associate Director of The Gifted Development Center, and said, "I need a reality check. Please don't humor me. Have I been an advocate for parents of the gifted for so many years that I just don't see how dysfunctional they really are?" Betty, who speaks to dozens of parents on the phone every week, laughed and assured me that, on the contrary, she finds them to be appropriately concerned about their children and accurate in their perceptions of their children's giftedness.

So why the bad press? What about the healthy, functional parents who comprise the vast majority of the 1,700 families that have brought their children to our Center? I did find one study that supports our positive view of the parents of gifted children. Mathews, West and Hosie (1986)

found that families of the gifted tend to have healthy interaction patterns and a higher level of psychological adjustment than the norm. But too many authors are patronizing and derogatory toward parents. Why?

So far, I've come up with the following possible explanations:

(1) Gifted children generally are not recognized as having special needs; therefore, when a parent approaches an administrator or teacher with requests for acceleration, more challenging work, or placement in a gifted program, she is often perceived as "pushy"—trying to obtain "special privileges" for her child. This has certainly been an accusation of school reformers who staunchly oppose any type of differentiated services.

(2) Although educators receive little, if any, training on meeting the special needs of the gifted, they often assume that they know what is best for *all* of their students. It is difficult to believe that parents might be more informed than they are on the educational needs of gifted children.

(3) Counselors and therapists receive no exposure to the unique concerns of the gifted. Therefore, they are likely

to misinterpret both the children and their parents (Silverman, 1993).

(4) Since most advocates are mothers rather than fathers, perhaps an underlying cause of the problem is lack of respect for the intelligence of mothers.

I have found parents of gifted children to be as intelligent as their children and to underestimate rather than overestimate their children's need for advancement. They often have to determine how to meet their children's needs with little support or understanding from others. They do not deserve derision. They deserve to be taken seriously and valued for the important role they play in their children's development.

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THE HIGHLY GIFTED

The Age-Grade Lockstep

"I don't want to be a pushy parent. . ."

This apologetic phrase has been the opening salvo of thousands of phone calls I have received over the past 13 years from the parents of extremely gifted children. Almost without exception, the parent was not pushy, but had real concerns about a child whose development was decidedly different. These were ordinary families with extraordinary children, children whose needs often could not or would not be met by the resources typically available to young families in their schools and communities.

Extreme giftedness may well be the most under-researched of all exceptionalities. Without basic research and accompanying public awareness, the myths surrounding an exceptionality continue to proliferate. Thus, what is sometimes perceived by educators and psychologists as "pushiness" is often simply a misunderstanding of the crucial roles parents play in the lives of their highly gifted children. These roles seem to cross both time and culture. Their patterns can be discerned as clearly in the families of exceptionally gifted Australian children (Gross, 1993) and in the poignant letters of mothers of extremely gifted African-American children of the 1940's (Martin D. Jenkins Collection) as in the experience of families of highly gifted American children today. These parents become organizers of their children's education; educators of educators; organizers, managers, and manipulators of co-incidence; and balancers of asynchronous development in the child and in the family [see Kearney, 1992, in *UOG*, 4(2)].

Organizers of Education

Parents of highly gifted children must organize and orchestrate the education of these children to a degree that is simply not asked of the parents of other children. This includes obtaining accurate information about the child's abilities and about educational options, and arranging, encouraging, and often financing the interventions. Furthermore, our society commonly asks them to do this without public monies, without political support, without upsetting other parents, without making too much extra work for the school, without any legal protection for the child's education, and without seeming "pushy." That is a tall order.

Educators of Educators

Most educators are genuinely concerned about the children they teach. However, few teacher training courses prepare educators to deal with eight-year-olds who are ready for calculus or Shakespeare. In addition, current trends in general education and child development downplay the needs of gifted children. Thus, parents may need to educate the educators not only about the development of this particular child, but about the phenomenon of extreme giftedness itself and about appropriate educational provisions. This must be done with the greatest of tact and kindness.

Managers of Co-incidence

Feldman introduced the concept of co-incidence in the life of a child prodigy:

Child and domain must be brought together under circumstances advantageous for sustained engagement. It may also be that certain kinds of prodigies will only appear and develop when a culture is itself organized to recognize and nurture excellence in that particular domain. (Feldman, 1986, p. 14)

Since prodigies and highly gifted children are still children, it is the

responsibility of their parents and the larger society to help them harness the forces of co-incidence in their lives. This sometimes means intervening when the culture is *not* "organized to recognize and nurture excellence" (Feldman, 1986, p. 14) or worse, is actually hostile to such an effort. Organizing, managing, and manipulating co-incidence is a major task of families of the highly gifted.

Consider how difficult it would be for a six-year-old child to break the lock-step of a schooling geared to the ability of the average child; to modify his financial condition; or to plan his own future in such a way as to insure higher education for himself. Such superhuman accomplishments are out of the question, no matter how gifted the child may be. Gifted children are virtually as helpless as any other children, under authorities blind to their exceptionality. (Hollingworth, 1937, p. 263)

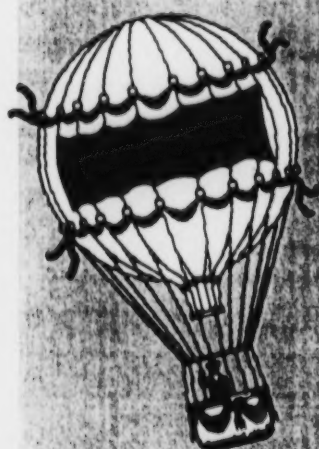
These parental roles are complex in and of themselves. They are complicated tremendously by our society's neglect of highly gifted children. It is time to put aside the myth of the "pushy parent," and to demonstrate respect for the enormous work parents of the most highly gifted children do in getting their children to adulthood reasonably intact emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. The work of that journey is never something to apologize for.

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Encounters

Jerry Flack

Tour Guide

Creative Books

From time to time, I enjoy sharing creative learning and teaching materials that may be useful to both classroom teachers and parents. Teachers may find these materials generate excitement in the classroom, and busy parents may desire some birthday, Christmas, and Hanukkah gift ideas.

The most creative teaching materials I have seen recently are two series of John Muir books distributed by the Whole Language publisher, The Wright Group (19201 - 120th Avenue NE, Bothell, WA 98011). The first series is called *Masters of Motion* and contains such titles as *How to Fly a 747*, *How to Fly the Space Shuttle*, and *How to Drive an Indy Race Car*. The books are extremely colorful, entertaining, and highly informative. A still newer series from the same publisher is *X-Ray Vision*. It features five subjects: *Looking Inside The Brain*, *Looking Inside Cartoon Animation*, *Looking Inside Sports Aerodynamics*, *Looking Inside Sunken Treasure* and *Looking Inside Telescopes and the Night Sky*. There will be very few youngsters alive who won't be stimulated by these two inventive and illuminating book series. These books should appeal to students in grades four and above.

Artistry and magic are found in many new picture books for readers of all ages. Few of these wonderful resources are just for primary-age students. Some of the best art in America today is found in picture books for children. Here are a few recent gems.

Ken Mochizuki's *Baseball Saved Us* is a poignant and bittersweet story of

family values. Dom Lee's dramatic and beautiful illustrations help to tell Mochizuki's story of how the game of baseball helped one group of Japanese Americans survive the injustice of an internment camp in World War II.

Imagination and history meet in *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*, Faith Ringgold's tribute to Harriet Tubman. Eight-year-old Cassie Louise Lightfoot and her brother, Bebe, fly high in Ringgold's quilt-like sky that is blue and filled with a sense of wonder.

George Ella Lyon's imaginative use of words and Peter Catalanotto's luminous artwork are creatively employed in *Dreamplace*, a time travel book that bridges the centuries to reveal the story of the Anasazi and Mesa Verde. The same duo repeat the early magic they displayed in *Who Came Down that Road?*

A fantastic storyteller named Agatha only just begins to enjoy her new feather bed from B. B. Lean when six naked geese show up demanding the return of their feathers in Carmen Agra Deedy's delightful book, *Agatha's Feather Bed: Not Just Another Wild Goose Story*. This joyous tale is about the origins of things. Laura L. Seeley's sparkling illustrations greatly enhance this wonderful and wacky tale.

Audrey Osofsky's book, *My Buddy*, speaks to the richness of the contributions both people and animals can have in our lives. Ted Rand's illustrations help to reveal the story of a boy with muscular dystrophy and Buddy, his Canine Companion, who makes it possible for him to negotiate his world and participate in it fully. The story demonstrates how the inclusion of all benefits all.

The Moon Lady is an adapted story from Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*. On a rainy day, a Chinese-

(Continued on page 18)

from parent

to parent

At a time when educators throughout the U.S. and Canada are expressing deep concern about the lack of parents' involvement with their children's education, parents of gifted children often notice a curious double standard. When they approach teachers and principals about their children's educational needs, they frequently find themselves criticized for being overly concerned about their children or over-involved with them, and insights that should be valued go unheeded.

Consider the following story, related by Carolyn and John Ingalls. Carolyn, an accountant who is currently a home-maker, and John, a university professor, were very distressed about the situation of their 7-year-old daughter Karen. A bright and vivacious child, whose advanced reading abilities are matched by strong interests in math and science, Karen's initial enthusiasm for school had given way to disappointment.

"In theory our school system recognizes that each child is an individual who

learns at a different rate, and schools are supposed to take account of those differences, but the reality for Karen was quite different. We tried everything we could to convince the teacher of Karen's need for something more. All the things a parent is supposed to do: bringing examples of the things she was doing at home, lists of the books she had read, etc. But we couldn't get anywhere."

The teacher grew concerned when Karen became increasingly tearful in class. Even then, however, her parents' perceptions were discounted. "The teacher was mainly concerned about Karen's social maturity and thought that giving her more demanding work would place too much pressure on her. We readily acknowledged that socially she was immature, but we couldn't buy the rest of her argument. Quite the opposite. Again and again we tried to convey to the teacher our understanding of our daughter. We tried to impress upon her that Karen needed additional challenge, that she thrived on it, that her tears

came not from too many demands being placed upon her but from too few."

The concerns about Karen's emotional adjustment at least led to her being tested. "When the psychologist reported back to us, 'You know, you have a very bright little girl here!' it was all we could do to keep our cool. At least the school finally acknowledged what we had been saying all along and acted upon the findings, but it was infuriating that even then we were made to feel that our own perceptions were of little account and the school knew best what our daughter needed."

The experience of the Ingalls is perhaps at one extreme, but it is unfortunately an experience told repeatedly by parents of gifted children. School systems today pay a lot of lip service to the importance of parents taking an active partnership role, but when parents attempt to offer insights about their children's learning needs, all too often they are considered over-concerned and pushy. As parents, we need to point out, diplomatically, when we receive this mixed message. The perspective we bring to the home/school equation is too important not to be valued.

Mary Lynn Baum is past president of the Gifted Children's Association of British Columbia, Canada, editor since 1983 of its newsletter, *Bright Connections*, and the parent of a highly gifted teenager.

Creative Books (Continued)

American woman entertains her bored grandchildren with a tale drawn from her own childhood experiences in China long ago. Gretchen Schields' bold, colorful, and richly detailed illustrations masterfully complement Ms. Tan's words.

Deedy, C. A. (1991). *Agatha's feather bed: Not just another wild goose story*. Atlanta: Peachtree.

Lyons, G. E. (1993). *Dreamplace*. Illus. by P. Catalanotto. New York: Orchard.

Lyons, G. E. (1992). *Who came down that road?* Illus. by P. Catalanotto. New York: Orchard.

Mochizuki, K. (1993). *Baseball saved us*. Illus. by D. Lee. New York: Lee & Low.

Osofsky, A. (1992). *My buddy*. Illus. by T. Rand. New York: Henry Holt.

Paulson, T. (1992). *Masters of motion: How to fly a 747*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Rubel, D. (1992). *Masters of motion: How to drive an Indy race car*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Schultz, R. (1993). *X-ray vision: Looking inside the brain*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Schultz, R. (1993). *X-ray vision: Looking inside cartoon animation*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Schultz, R. (1993). *X-ray vision: Looking inside sports aerodynamics*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Schultz, R. (1993). *X-ray vision: Looking inside sunken treasure*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Schultz, R. (1993). *X-ray vision: Looking inside telescopes and the night sky*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Shorto, R. (1992). *Masters of motion: How to fly the space shuttle*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir.

Ringgold, F. (1992). *Aunt Harriet's underground railroad in the sky*. New York: Crown.

Tan, A. (1992). *The moon lady*. Illus. by G. Schields. New York: Macmillan.

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is a President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado, and the author of several books, including *Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors*.



ANTENNA

Current Developments in Gifted Education

At the end of each school year I talk with parents of gifted children like Sally, Lauren and Benjamin. We evaluate the past year and confirm plans to contact appropriate school personnel before the new semester begins. We discuss how much smoother this past year would have been if parents had prior opportunities to inform new teachers about unique learning abilities and needs of Sally, Lauren and Benjamin.

* Sally's dad could share her life-long love of animals and her burning desire to become a veterinarian, passions that she was reluctant to talk about in school.

* The parents of five-year-old Lauren could describe her prolific reading ability and her lack of interest in kindergarten when she realized that none of the other kids could read "long books."

* Benjamin's mom could tell of the two sides of her son: the boisterous, funny, disruptive class clown, popular with sixth grade classmates but not with teachers; and the intense, quiet computer programmer at home.

Before school begins each year, I optimistically contact the new teachers of Sally, Lauren and Benjamin and request conferences in which parents can share their accumulation of valuable knowledge. And each year I am informed by the teachers, "We like to find out about students for ourselves. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled in three months, and we should be ready to discuss that information then."

By the time conferences occur, Sally's number of absences has become alarmingly high, Lauren has developed severe stomach cramps requiring regular medication, and Benjamin has received two failing grades in the first quarter.

The theme of "Valuing Parents" and the two lead articles in this issue cause me once again to wonder why it is necessary to remind teachers to listen to parents. Parents of gifted children possess years of painstakingly gathered observations, information and gut feelings about their children, and they're willing to share before problems develop. Teachers' lack of

interest in such valuable resources is counterproductive.

Granted, parent perceptions are subjective. Parents often need advice from professional educators to assist in sorting through all the data. But they have lived and interacted with their children closely for so many years before school was part of their children's lives. Information presented to teachers is not necessarily scientific, but it is well meant; it can be appropriately sorted; and it may, if used properly, just help a child.

Parents, when you finally do arrange that important conference, be prepared. Bring test scores, professional evaluations, anecdotal records and products. Make sure you've read the latest educational theories, particularly in gifted education (Read *Understanding Our Gifted!*), and keep informed on available resources in your district. Be concise and practical!

Teachers, the cost for listening to parents is high in terms of time, and you have little extra to give. However, the rewards are substantial as you utilize parent communication to make more effective use of time in your classrooms.

Dorothy Knopper, M.A., is a private consultant for gifted education in Colorado and the publisher of *Understanding Our Gifted*.

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